



Navigating the unfamiliar in a quest towards culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines a New Zealand *Pākehā* (European) teacher's professional development experience working with *Māori* (indigenous people of New Zealand), and their protocols and practices. A *Māori kaumatua* (male leader) experienced in theatre direction, acting, and psychiatric nursing led *Māori* marginalised youth to disclose their personal stories, wrap them in *tikanga* (customs) and move forward to create theatre from their experiences. This paper discusses a participant observer process of living on a *marae* (*Māori* congregational place), working with *Māori*, experiencing *Māori* protocols and practices on a daily basis, and the recommendations for teachers dealing with cultural difference in the classroom.

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1. Background

This is a time of major change, both economic and cultural (Luke, 2004). In our changing world of increasing geographical mobility, economic crisis, political tension, and cultural mixing, the work in schools to generate cohesion within mixed communities becomes even more important (Johnson, 2004). (Hale, Snow-Gerono, and Morales 2008, p. 1424) argue, "Educators must embrace new ways of challenging themselves to think differently about the world they live in and how the world affects the educational experiences of their students." In 2004, Luke framed this in terms of schools grappling with cultural and linguistic diversity, whereas by 2006 Luke and Goldstein were identifying challenges for teacher education, the greatest challenge being to find ways to teach across and around difference. They suggested that teachers need to change pedagogy, performance, consciousness and voice to address difference in the classroom.

Teachers in New Zealand (a diverse, multi-cultural Commonwealth, South Pacific country with an estimated resident population of four and a quarter million people) also grapple with cultural and linguistic diversity. Teachers face the dilemmas of finding ways to recognise and work to the individual learning needs

of students, and to foster respect for difference in their culturally diverse classrooms. In their study of intercultural communication experiences of both international and domestic students, Ho, Holmes and Cooper (2004) stated that in New Zealand teachers' linguistic, cultural and educational backgrounds are often different from those of their students, and educators first need to recognise and understand these differences, and then discover ways to manage them effectively.

Various New Zealand researchers have offered solutions. Alton-Lee (2003) suggested that teachers have a key role to play in creating culturally inclusive classrooms that involve all members, whatever their identity. She stated quality teaching strengthens teachers' capability and enhances all students' achievement and well being. Alternatively, Bishop (1999) suggested that power imbalances could be addressed in mainstream classrooms through *Māori* cultural aspirations and practices (in ways that will benefit all students), whereas, Macfarlane (2004) recommended that more emphasis be placed on diverse pedagogies in both pre-service and in-service professional development provision as he perceived too many teachers knew too little about culturally relevant pedagogy. However, Macfarlane (2004) also stated educators, who are culturally sensitive, would be more able to recognise and work to the learning needs of students in diverse classrooms.

In New Zealand concern about underachievement of *Māori* and Pasifika in relation to other students is a matter of high priority for the Ministry of Education. An on-going initiative that is proving to be one of the most successful in raising achievement for *Māori* in

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terms of academic, behaviour and attendance is *Te Kotahitanga* (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai, & Richardson, 2003) funded by the Ministry of Education. This initiative has taken some of its guiding principles from Māori students' own perceptions of what helps and hinders them in classrooms and in schools generally. Associated with this initiative is pedagogy of relations that takes as its main focus the importance of the relationship between teachers and students in classrooms with a fundamental belief that Māori students should be allowed to bring who they are into the classroom. Although this study appears prescriptive, and lacks the guidance to show how to achieve these aspects, some of the lessons learned from the Te Kotahitanga Initiative (Bishop et al., 2003) are: the importance of students finding their own voice in classrooms; students being encouraged to bring who they are into schools; and, respect for the family background, culture and prior experiences of everyone concerned, both students and teachers. From the analysis of Māori students', teachers', principals' and whānau members' narratives, Bishop and Berryman (2006) concluded the key to solving the problems facing Māori students lies in the quality of relationships between teachers and students and the acknowledgement of students' cultural experiences and understandings. These researchers identify specific factors that can help create effective learning relationships:

These include the teacher: caring for the child as a culturally located human being; having high expectations of the learning and behavioural performance of the child; and, having high expectations of their own performance, in terms of planning, class organisation, assessment and curriculum knowledge. (Bishop & Berryman, 2006, p. 264)

Another recent initiative is the Ministry of Education (MOE) (2008) *Māori Education Ka Hikitia: Managing for Success 2008–2012*. According to Chris Carter (New Zealand Government, 2008):¹

The key messages of Ka Hikitia are: Māori learners have potential, they are culturally advantaged, and they are inherently capable. They need to be successful and they have the right to be so as Māori. Ka Hikitia recognises that we need: high-quality teaching that is culturally relevant and personalised; strong and responsive principal leadership; effective professional development where teachers continue to learn, and where they learn from their students. Ka Hikitia – Managing for Success is integral to transforming New Zealand into an innovative economy, strengthening our national identity and supporting strong and vibrant New Zealand families, whānau and communities. Ka Hikitia – Managing for Success also seeks to transform secondary school in ways that: encourage young people to stay and complete qualifications; strengthen partnerships between schools and their communities; and, connect young people to the next steps in learning and beyond school.

This paper tells the story of my personal quest to understand the other-culture perspectives of the Māori students in my classes. I examine (through a reflective narration) my 3-month full immersion teacher professional development experience in Māori cultural protocols and practices that changed my consciousness and voice, enabled me to address my deficit thinking and find ways to manage cultural difference in the classroom. This experience was designed, as (Hale et al., 2008, p. 1418) describe, “to grasp an *emic* or insider's perspective versus an *etic* or outsider perspective”. My experience is the primary data analysed. It is examined in the context of *Te Ao Māori* (Māori world view) to ascertain how living and working amongst Māori developed my culturally responsive practices which

now allow me to confidently explore territories of cultural difference in the classroom.

2. Methodology

In a desire to change my teaching practice (and student outcomes) I initiated entrance into the social world of Māori and undertook effective professional development to experience and unearth a context-specific solution to a problem of practice. I achieved this by engaging in a *marae* theatre experience, as described in more detail later in this paper. According to Berg (2004), reflective practitioners understand that they are part of the lived social experience that is being investigated and that an ongoing conversation with self is a pre-requisite to reflexivity. He suggests that the researchers must examine what they know and how they came to know it. This stance of self-discovery requires an ability to scrutinise personal truths, the situation, and to understand how processes inform the work (Taylor, 1996).

I chose this mode of careful interpretation and reflective inquiry to enhance understanding of this *marae* theatre experience. Through this philosophical introspection and self-critical examination of preconceptions, I subjected my own conceptual framework to criticism (Harding, 1996, cited in Lynch, 2000). This is as Gouldner (1973) describes reflexive sociology: a methodology perceived as a transformative movement incessantly constructing, applying and developing an understanding of the world.

I acknowledge the existing tensions regarding reflexivity as a methodology in regards to the multiplicity of meanings, uses, and validity of the findings (Czyzewski, 1994; Davis, 1959; Hammersley, 1999; Lynch, 2000; Paechter, 1996; Troyna, 1994). I acknowledge too, the focus of this paper may be perceived as a one-sided, low level, suppositional abstraction of my lived experience. However, in hindsight, through the self-critical eye of my interpreter, writer authority, reflexivity appeared the best approach to identify the pertinence of this experience to extrapolate the story (results) and ascertain the transformative influence on my teaching practice. This paper contributes insights into the skills, knowledge, understandings and attitudes teachers may gain through experiencing life in a cross-cultural space and how this lived experience may build their future teacher capability to deal with cultural difference in the classroom.

2.1. The courage to change

My need for change, my decision to embark on professional development with *Te Rakau Hua O Te Wao Tapu*, and how this experience came about is unfolded through the following three sections: need for change; making it happen; and beginning of change.

2.1.1. Need for change

Prior to this *marae* experience I lived in Christchurch, the largest city in the South Island of New Zealand which has a population of approximately 320,000 people. I had obtained a university degree whilst living on a state benefit single parenting two sons for 8 years, and had been teaching drama for 9 years at a school strong in the arts (dance, drama, music and visual art). At this time I perceived myself as an attentive listener and competent teacher experienced in facilitating devised plays based on students' lived experiences. However, in this inner city, multi-cultural, co-educational, secondary state school I became cognisant over time that the curriculum I was providing was not engaging Māori students. I observed them within the constructs of my curriculum: “not reaching their own optimal social and personal development” (Shaw, 1998, p. 3). In my opinion, these Māori students were not motivated to learn and succeed in my drama classes because of the

¹ <http://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/launch+ka+hikitia+%E2%80%93+managing+success>.

family circumstantial deficiencies that were obstructing their learning. I believed their parents did not value education and consequently these students lacked academic aspirations. Over time these Māori students did not participate in class activities, they were frequently absent from class and eventually some left school without qualifications. I have since recognised this as deficit thinking as I was making judgements about another cultural group that I did not understand. As a Pākehā of south-east London descent I lacked the vision, understanding, and praxis necessary to completely understand these Māori students (Tierney, 2006).

Furthermore, I lacked the skills, cultural knowledge, understandings and attitude to change these circumstances. Macfarlane (2004) suggests that this may be a common experience for New Zealand non-Māori teachers. He maintains western theory, behaviour interventions and strategies have not historically succeeded in New Zealand schools, especially when trying to change Māori student behaviour. This is due to many teachers' treatment of students as isolated individuals away from the context of their caring, supportive *whānau* (extended family) (Wearmouth, McKinney, & Glynn, 2007). The underachieving Māori students in my classes created a tension for me as Māori academic success was one aspect of the *Treaty of Waitangi* I (as one of the gate keepers to their education) was not honouring.

New Zealand was established as a nation by a founding document, the 1840 *Treaty of Waitangi*, which remains today central to New Zealand law and society. Lieutenant-Governor Hobson, representative of the British Crown, and 512 Māori chiefs signed the *Treaty of Waitangi* which (based on the principles of protection, partnership, and participation) promised a power-sharing relationship (Macfarlane, Glynn, Grace, Penetito, & Bateman, 2008). According to Durie (2005), this 1840 treaty, which created a special relationship between the Crown and Māori, has implications for education policy. This partnership "requires the Crown to actively protect the interests of Māori and to respect a degree of autonomy where this is not incompatible with the wider public good" (Glover & Baird, 2002, p. 40). The treaty implies that Māori have the right to expect a teaching and learning process that addresses their cultural values and aspirations, and that the state education system will allow Māori students to succeed in their learning to the same extent as it addresses Pākehā students' needs (Greenwood & Brown, 2005).

I wondered if experiencing Māori culture would enable me to provide a teaching and learning process that addressed Māori cultural values and aspirations in my drama classes. I also wondered how I might gain this understanding associated with the experience. I understood I lacked a culturally responsive perspective and needed professional development regarding things Māori. These wonderings led me to explore the internet for options. I found information regarding Moriarty's Theatre Company, *Te Rakau Hua O Te Wao Tapu*.

Moriarty (Māori actor, theatre director and psychiatric nurse), along with his theatre company, were contracted by the state to use theatre as a method for social change in prisons, or with marginalised youth in their communities. The Māori youth Moriarty worked with were at risk within the school system or had already fallen from the system. As a method, this work drew heavily on cultural traditions, contexts and storytelling of the Māori of Aotearoa New Zealand (Baskerville, 2006) and offered the dispossessed a voice that revealed the dark face of the capitalist system to the audience (Scott, 2006). I attended a performance in the Christchurch Women's Prison, grasped the learning potential of Moriarty's devising process, and recognised this could be pertinent professional development. I initiated contact with Moriarty through my networks.

2.1.2. Making it happen

Moriarty and I discussed my motives, possible timeframes, and my role as a facilitator. He invited me to join his company in

Northland (a mainly Māori populated province in the far north of the North Island) on their contract with *Nga Puhi Iwi* Social Services, and wrote a letter to my Board of Trustees which awarded me 3 months' leave. Facilitators usually were members who had experienced prior processes of this method; however, in acknowledgement of my teaching experience, Moriarty promoted me to the position of facilitator and together with other facilitators, led novice participants through this process.

2.1.3. Beginning of change

Due to low enrolments, day after day, all over Northland, Moriarty went looking for youth to participate in this project. He explained to them the "Te Rakau method" (Baskerville, 2006, p. 175) that encourages marginalised youth to become immersed in devising theatre for change. The word spread. Our *whānau* grew to 90. For 3 months I lived on a small family *marae*. This unknown experience was nerve racking initially as I lived in fear of offending my hosts. The *whānau* needed a cook. Moriarty suggested I would learn more about things Māori in this role. I agreed. One's learning both as a woman and as a new member to a Māori *whānau* often begins in the kitchen. By day, I organised youth to prepare lunch for a hundred in an oven with one rack, and by night, dinner for 40 in a kitchen with no hot water. This was a meaningful context to learn more about teaching and managing the behaviours of marginalised youth, giving clear instructions, meeting deadlines, delegating tasks in an unfamiliar work context and understanding more about myself. However, it was the exposure to Māori protocols and practices on a daily basis that changed my world view and future practice, and built my cultural understanding and ability to address cultural difference in the classroom.

3. Meaningful contexts for learning

In the following section I tell stories of specific Māori protocols and practices (*powhiri*, welcome ceremony; *karakia*, prayers; *hui*, meeting; *marae* justice; and *poroporoaki*, farewell) that developed my understanding of things Māori and changed my perspective toward educating Māori students attending my future drama classes.

3.1. Powhiri (welcome ceremony)

During the tour of our theatre piece in Northland and Auckland through the ritual of many *powhiri* (in many schools and on many *marae*) I was welcomed on to the land. As an articulate, European, Pākehā woman I accepted (with reservation) losing the ability to speak for myself on the *marae*, but understood that I had been previously consulted, and Moriarty represented my voice.

I built knowledge of things Māori, and came to respect the process of *powhiri*: the power of Māori oratory, the strength of the *whānau*, the respect and status Māori gave their elders, the use and richness of Māori language, the tributes paid to the deceased and the way they honoured links to the past. I learnt the importance of the time and space given to establish relationships, roles and responsibilities for Māori. These rituals provided my safe passage from the status of visitor to part of the host *whānau*, reduced my anxiety, and honoured the rights and responsibilities of people involved. All these experiences provided me with insights into the inimitable and spiritual world of Māori. I realised the significance and power of ritual, the benefits of the world Māori inhabit, and their commitment to, and ownership of, the process.

3.2. Karakia (prayers)

Before we ate or embarked on any travel, Moriarty as *kaumatua* (male leader) carried out *karakia* protocols in acknowledgement of

the ultimate power and influence of the God of our understanding. *Karakia* were embedded in everyday living. Daily we travelled many miles in vans to a local village hall to devise and rehearse our drama. We gathered outside the *wharenui* (meeting house) for a *karakia* for safe travel. We continued this ritual as we toured the performance around the region. During this time I gained insights into the open expression of *Māori* spirituality, their consequent holistic approach to life and well being, and the power of their collective consciousness.

3.3. Hui (meetings)

Many times whilst living on the *marae* I attended *hui* where facilitators met together for supervision, or to gain a shared understanding of the question in hand. Again, I experienced the significance of *Māori* time: the time taken to set the tone, to give clear explanations of the process, to ensure we all knew each other, to guarantee everyone was ready and willing to talk, to ensure all understood the intention of the *korero* (shared talking), and validate everyone in their right to express their opinion and be listened to. This process was never rushed. Time was allocated to question, challenge, and to explicitly ensure all developed a shared understanding of the agenda. High expectations were set. I realised the importance of *korero*. I viewed inclusion through a new lens informed by these insights. The following story illustrates the rationale for my perception change, and the profound commitment *Māori* make to the safety and well being of their *whānau* within the context of *marae* justice.

3.4. Marae justice

Two female youth members of our *whānau* stole a female facilitator's car. The police were contacted. After a joyride, the police tracked them down, and contacted the female facilitator. One offender chose to return to our *whānau* whilst the other chose to progress through the youth justice system. The entire *whānau* was called to a meeting in the *wharenui*. We gathered and sat on forms, at tables in a square formation, to begin this consultative process. The evening was set aside. Moriarty explained the process. The offender and victim agreed to communicate with the *whānau* about the consequences of the event. The facilitator (who owned the car) effectively described the impact of the crime on her. One by one every *whānau* member stood, and had their say regarding the impact of this theft on them, and expressed their opinion regarding whether the offender should stay or leave our *whānau*. The offender, who listened throughout, finally (at Moriarty's prompting) stood to speak. She admitted responsibility for the crime, acknowledged she had wronged the facilitator, and expressed genuine regret for stealing the car. This *marae* justice process was encouraging the victim to repent, reform, reconcile and repair in order to restore her "moral standing in the community" (Duff, 1996, p. 54, cited in Daly, 2000, p.18).

In his role as the respected leader Moriarty summated the voices of the *whānau*. He made a decision regarding the consequences of this offence, and the way forward. It was decided the offender would be withdrawn from all theatre activities, and allocated a job to help prepare, cook and serve meals for the *whānau*. The facilitator (whose car had been stolen) was invited to speak again. Although she expressed her lingering anger and fears, she acknowledged the apology and her intent to support the offender through the process. This sign of remorse and step to forgiveness appear to begin the restorative process (Daly, 2000).

Over the next month the offender took responsibility for her actions, completed the required tasks in the kitchen, and was returned to the floor, working hard to catch up on the already devised work. This reparation process is as (Retzinger and Scheff,

1996, pp. 316–317) state: "key to reconciliation, victim satisfaction and decreasing recidivism." In this way the *marae* restorative justice process appeared to be an alternative punishment, not alternative to punishment (Daly, 2000).

This *marae* justice experience provided me with a rich *Māori* perspective. This process acknowledged the importance of time in repairing relationships, developing a shared understanding of the impact of this crime on the entire *whānau*, a collaborative learning process that involved the stakeholders in a positive way, and the power of using the *kanohi-ki-te-kanohi* (face-to-face) form of communication. Through this process *manaakitanga* (the value of sharing and supporting) became evident. The *mana* (personal standing) of both the victim and the offender were restored. Their views had been respected. The *whānau* had been consulted, and the right of these community members to participate in a culturally appropriate way was preserved. This was a work of *taonga* (value). Wearmouth et al. (2007) describe such restorative justice intervention as shifting the focus away from the victim, or perpetrator to whole communities.

3.5. Poroporoaki (farewell)

At the conclusion of our 3-month contract we (the facilitators) participated in a 12-h *poroporoaki* Moriarty initiated to acknowledge our shared lived experience. Over time each facilitator acknowledged the impact of every other facilitator's work on their lived experience during this time spent together. This *Māori* protocol revealed again the power of using the *kanohi-ki-te-kanohi* form of communication. Through this process I gained insights into the significance of relationship building, an understanding of how to grow *mana*, the importance and power of closure, and the *Māori* culturally appropriate way to say goodbye.

4. Findings: culturally relevant learning

The following section (full immersion) discusses the positive impact of these lived experiences of *Māori* protocols and practices on my changed understanding of things *Māori*.

4.1. Full immersion

This *marae* setting was an important aspect when considering the situatedness of learning (Bruner, 1996; Ginsberg, 2005; Lave & Wenger, 1991) as everything in this learning environment counted: materials and interaction between the learning community members; youth interactions with the group task; the way tasks (or learning) were valued; youth interactions with *marae* theatre culturally relevant pedagogy (*powhiri*, welcome; *waiata*, songs; *haka*, posture dance, which is primarily led by males; *patu/tiaha*, weaponry configurations used with a short club or stick; and *poi*, flax ball on the end of a short four-plaited string used in retelling of stories); and reflections. Every interaction was important. In this context I was able to achieve an understanding of the cultural worlds of these marginalised youth and their community (Pare, 2004) as a significant factor in the successful outcomes (Macfarlane, 2004). I observed changes in many of these youth due to their reconnection with their culture through the relevant pedagogy of *marae* theatre. This meaningful context, high expectations, regular nutritious food, regular sleep and use of local *Māori* community expertise supported these *Māori* marginalised youth to achieve.

The well-established routines provided structure; the inclusive environment enabled them to tell their personal stories; and the multiple performances provided healing as the memory of past hurt left their bodies. The *mahi* (work) was a place where these participants could safely bring who they were to the learning interactions, and where their prior knowledge was acceptable and

valid (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). Moriarty's programme "proved therapeutic, built self-discipline among the adolescents and affirmed their cultural identity" (Van Wetering, 2001, p. 32). This is as (Bruner, 1996, p. 81, cited in Bishop, 1999, p. 3) argues: "[w]e have known for years that if you treat people, young kids included, as responsible, contributing parties to the group, they will grow into it – some better than others, obviously, but all benefit."

I agree with Tierney's (2006) proposition that it is troubling to cross-cultural spaces as tensions may arise. However, reconciling the many tensions (misunderstandings, rising anger, incongruence, challenges to values and beliefs, and dealing with shame) I experienced throughout the process produced a positive outcome. This experience of absorbing Māori protocols, processes and rituals influenced and changed my world view. I became familiar and at ease with: a *kaupapa* that was agreed and reinforced; *karakia*, waiting and ensuring circumstances for all to be ready and willing to learn; *powhiri* that developed my sense of belonging to Aotearoa New Zealand; *hui* that privileged my voice in negotiating shared understandings with the group of facilitators; safe disclosure; the value of supervision; *marae* justice in restoring relationships; and *poroporoaki* in terms of closure. I learnt how different living in a Māori cultural and community context was from school and our mainstream community.

I came to understand (from within a lived Māori world) how the cultural scripts for Māori students are shaped by values, beliefs, attitudes, needs, and customs that are the essence of Māori culture itself (Salter, 2000). I recognised the potential for this gained knowledge, understanding, and change in attitude to transfer to the classroom. Rose (1995, p. 276) describes this "consciousness of possibility" as the "ability to imagine improved conditions." I regret I did not formalise this research project by committing to an ethnographic writing process as a professional development tool, to report and provide evidence of my lived experience. Identifying my cultural biases, assumptions, values and beliefs and a formal research question prior to this situated learning professional development would have added rigor. I lacked this research prior knowledge at the time.

5. Discussion: application to the classroom as culturally responsive pedagogy

I returned to the classroom with new, culturally responsive philosophies and strategies that enabled me to rethink my teaching practice. I acknowledge these changes that have shaped my current practice during the following three sections: a culturally inclusive learning environment, relationship building, and *korero*.

5.1. A culturally inclusive learning environment

There was a shift in my teaching philosophy as a result of this *marae* experience. Through this process I matured in my understanding of Māori concepts, like *kanohi-ki-te-konohi*, *manaakitanga* (youth being cared for as culturally located beings), *whānau* and *whakawhanaungatanga* (building family-like relationships). I envisioned these concepts in the classroom and became more committed to establishing a culturally inclusive learning environment based on the three principles of the treaty: protection, partnership and participation. I had the motivation, courage and dedication to trial new ways of working in the classroom. I achieved this by co-constructing with my students a clearly defined agreement that made explicit the principles guiding our learning process, our responsibilities to one another, and provided a teaching strategy to assist in creating an environment conducive to teaching and learning that focused on establishing quality relationships. The insight, knowledge and understanding into things Māori gained during this professional development experience

enabled me to establish effective teaching and learning relationships with my students on return to my classroom. According to the MOE (2008) this is a key factor in raising student engagement and achievement.

I became even more committed to creating a learning environment where my students were safe to take risks in their learning. I used the principle of *karakia* to invite students to offer a song, a quote, a story, or a movement to open our lesson. This ritual, as if a *powhiri*, was used to open the space so we were ready and willing to enter our learning with positive attitudes and the openness required to work together. I was explicit in both giving instructions, and declaring my expectations. I strengthened my use of a talking circle as a safe place to address misunderstandings and discuss learning. This circle contributed to a shared power relationship where we could all see each other in a circle, and were partners in the learning conversation (Bishop & Glynn, 2000). This physical positioning of people in space signalled we were learners together, we were equal, and we were in the learning business of open, honest, stimulating conversations. I had a renewed desire to make a difference in the lives of my students. I returned to the classroom with a renewed passion for teaching and learning, and a stronger sense of belonging to Aotearoa New Zealand.

5.2. Relationship building

I had witnessed the importance of positive, united relationships for Māori. The relevance of this notion in the classroom is noted by Wilson (2005) who states it is the quality of the relationships (between student–student and student–teacher) within the classroom setting that impacts on student learning and wellbeing. I took more time and space to establish relationships and facilitate mutual respect so an optimal opportunity was established for learning in the classroom. The newly gained understanding of Māori protocols and practices enabled me to be more attentive to student body language and non-verbal signals. I facilitated classroom discussion to clarify misunderstandings, one-on-one chats to ease discomfort, and encouraged students to be honest and open in their feedback to others when discussing equity issues, like the impact of student absence on their group rehearsals. I used personal stories to illustrate another perspective.

I took more time to get to know my students through conferencing, and liaising with parents and other teachers. I contributed to Individual Education Plans with my targeted learning students and their parents. Through this process I began to understand the learning needs of my students at a deeper level. I modelled fairness and patience and was consistent in my restorative justice approach to repairing relationships. I took time outside the classroom to conference one-on-one with students reluctant in their learning. Together we identified the barriers to learning, and designed strategies that would support their positive interaction with others in the classroom. These included time out, a learning buddy, and time to conference each week regarding the learning difficulties they were experiencing.

I was a learner on the *marae*. I had experienced learning alongside the Māori youth and encountered their generous, willing, gentle ways of respecting me when sharing their cultural knowledge and wisdom. I understood I was not the "fountain of all knowledge" (Bishop & Glynn, 2000, p. 4). When I returned to the classroom I was conscious of, and open to, learning from my students. Māori describe this as *ako* (reciprocal teaching and learning) which describes "a teaching and learning relationship where the educator is also learning from the student and where education practices are informed by the latest research" (MOE, 2008). I carried this philosophy back into my classroom, and recognised my students as resources and my potential to learn from them (Tierney, 2006). I acknowledged student prior knowledge and

identified experts to lead the teaching. I was more sensitive to student shyness. I supported students with learning buddies to share ideas before expressing their opinions to the entire group. I accepted students' unwillingness to advance without their peers (who were struggling with the learning), trusted their pace of working in small groups and negotiated extended deadline times to perform their work to the class. In our classroom we built a relaxed community of learners who enjoyed working together.

Before this *marae* experience I closed classroom sessions with questions to ensure students had returned from their imaginary world created through drama, ready to enter the world of learning in their next class. At the end of classes I began to encourage students to reflect on their learning. Over time this has developed into a reflective circle: students are "given time and space to collect their private thoughts about their personal learning, and an opportunity to listen to the reflection of others" (Baskerville, 2008, p. 37). To close a year's work for a class I now conduct *poroporoaki* on the final class. I pace the farewells to take an hour. During this hour each student identifies how every other student's work (acts of kindness, strengths and (or) learning) impacted on their school life that year. It appears this act (having particularly influenced my experience of *poroporoaki* protocol on the *marae*) consolidates relations and enables students to conclude the year positively.

5.3. Korero (shared talking)

I possessed a deeper understanding of the significance and importance of *korero*. Moriarty dealt with conflict openly (and in the moment) as he maintained that unresolved conflict later emerged and impacted negatively on relationships. Moriarty took responsibility for our *whānau* and modelled leadership. Prior to this *marae* experience I took student comments and actions personally, did not always successfully clarify misunderstandings and struggled with tension around deadlines involving stage performances. Back in the classroom I openly discussed the impact of inappropriate behaviours on other students who overtly expressed their honest emotions without fear of reproach from others. I confidently took responsibility for the leadership in the classroom. I addressed misunderstandings, set clear boundaries, promoted reciprocal learning, and had high expectations for all students immediately addressing any disruption to our teaching and learning processes. Although the guiding principles varied from class to class, reoccurring themes appeared such as, we are learners together, we value one another's opinions, and we give time to others to voice their opinions. This approach aligned with my newly gained understanding of a *Māori* world view:

... learning relationships need to embody a careful balance between task orientation and task completion on the one hand, and caring and supportive on the other. Learning relationships also need to balance individual achievement against responsibilities for the well-being and achievement of the group, and to allow for free exchanging of teaching and learning roles. (Macfarlane et al., 2008, p. 105)

I drew on all these experiences to design and frame a master's research project. An approach to enhanced understandings of self, others and cultural perspectives emerged from this research: developing a way of working through establishing a caring, supportive learning environment, privileging student participant voice through narratives, and enhancing participant connectedness and relationship change (Baskerville, 2008).

In hindsight I see a great difference in my teaching pedagogy because of this *marae* experience. I addressed my deficit thinking. In critically revisiting my own teaching practice (instead of focusing on my perception of student circumstantial deficits) I possessed the sensitivity and responsiveness to cultural differences, and used these

understandings to inform teaching and learning (Tierney, 2006). Bishop and Berryman (2006) describe this as "examining and challenging teachers' assumptions, practices and discursive positionings in relation to *Māori* students [to] consider the part they play in their students' learning" (p. 275). By experiencing and transferring my understanding of *Māori* protocols and practices, I was able to address power imbalances in ways that benefited all my students.

I now co-construct an agreement that forms the underlying principles guiding our learning process; identify consequent repercussions with my students; address breaches in this agreement the moment they occur; and collaboratively establish strict routines to build trust before entering the curriculum. Prior to this *marae* experience I dictated my classroom rules in more negative language: no put-downs or no talking when others are talking. I work harder to establish a safe, culturally inclusive learning environment (Baskerville, 2008). I welcome students into the space and slowly take time to explain the process. Late students no longer cause stress. Rather I welcome them, stop to catch them up and explain the lesson content. I expose situations that create negative classroom dynamics that impinge on learning. I encourage my students to take the same level of responsibility, and respect others' right to learn. On the *marae*, in respect for *Māori* protocols and practices and overwhelming uncertainty of how to behave, I experienced a loss of voice. It took time to rebuild my confidence to speak openly in public arenas again. However, I was clearer and stronger in expressing my views. As a result, in the classroom I now strategise to privilege the silent voices in the classroom and provide opportunities for them to speak by foreshadowing the question I am about to pose. I have a renewed passion in the power of drama to enhance student self-esteem and to facilitate change in their lives, especially when devising drama from their own experiences. I have further developed my skills to facilitate conversations, and negotiate meaningful contexts for learning. I openly express my passion for teaching and learning. I confidently lead this process in partnership with the other learners in the room. I suggest this *marae* experience not only benefited me and *Māori* students, it has benefited all of my students.

6. Concluding thoughts

This rich, challenging *marae* professional development experience enabled me to return to the secondary classroom with new strategies, a reclaimed passion for teaching drama, and a new lens by which to view life. This experience challenged my deficit thinking and need to take responsibility for *Māori* student engagement in learning in my classroom. Through this experience I built the knowledge of things *Māori* and the disposition to teach differently, acknowledging student prior knowledge (who they were and what they brought to the classroom) and practice reciprocal teaching and learning principles thus ensuring their participation in class activities.

These changes in consciousness that built my disposition for culturally responsive teaching (as identified through my process) are: sensitivity and responsiveness to cultural differences, passion for teaching and learning, high motivation, honesty, leadership, and clarity of mind and intent. Inherent in my improved performance in the classroom are strong visionary and facilitation skills to establish shared understandings, mutual respect, reciprocal learning, to address issues, clarify misunderstandings, and establish (and restore) quality relationships. In my rethought classroom pedagogy there is a commitment to establishing our classroom *whānau* collective consciousness to maintain an ordered, safe, culturally inclusive learning environment based on consultation, protection, partnership and participation where quality relationships are maintained and reciprocal teaching and learning are the focus for all in this learning community.

I am not Māori. As a Pākehā of south-east London descent I will never understand what it is to be Māori. This cross-cultural, situated learning full immersion professional development experience of things Māori enabled me to be at ease in Māori contexts, gain the insight into what questions to ask, the confidence to ask these questions, and the insight and courage to trial these newly gained culturally responsive practices in my classrooms. Although a personal story situated within the specific context of New Zealand working with indigenous Māori youth, this experience (and the lessons derived from it) may be of relevance to other educators in the world who are challenging themselves to think and work differently in relation to their other-culture students. Educators may find that through immersing themselves in a cross-cultural, situated learning professional development experience and working with other-culture students, they are able to change their deficit thinking, build their cultural knowledge and apply this new-found insight to transform their teaching pedagogy. However, this full immersion model cannot be applied to many situations. Teachers may not have opportunities to cross cultures and experience the world of their other-culture students in their classes. In New Zealand there may be the opportunity for teachers to work in Kura Kaupapa schools (total immersion in Māori language and culture). This would provide a pertinent educational setting for teacher professional development. Again, these cultural contexts may not exist internationally. I therefore suggest professional development providers and teachers collaborate to establish links with other-culture groups in their school communities. This would provide teachers with opportunities to gain insights into the skills, knowledge and understanding that develop respect for family background culture (Bishop et al., 2003); care for their other-culture students as “culturally located beings” (Bishop & Berryman, 2006) and strengthen partnerships between schools and communities (MOE, 2008).

In the context of such professional development, formalising an ethnographic writing process, and identifying specific other-culture students to observe and study, educators may understand this other-culture student world view and be more effective in their teaching. By deconstructing their teaching identities and practice, educators will respond to Hale et al.'s (2008, p. 1425) suggestion to embrace new ways of broadening their thinking and challenging themselves “to better understand the potential difference students may bring to the classroom and how they may best serve their students.” Teachers' engagement in such professional development to enable them to develop effective teaching and learning relationships with other-culture students leads to improved student engagement and achievement (MOE, 2008). Through such experiences these educators may develop culturally responsive philosophies and strategies, take responsibility for other-culture students' learning, and build the confidence to deal with cultural difference when they return to their own classrooms.

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